

U. S. CHEMICAL SAFETY AND HAZARD INVESTIGATION BOARD

**Oral Testimony of
The Board Members
Presented by
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<http://www.chemsafety.gov>

**Presented Before the
Subcommittee on HUD, VA and Independent Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
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Mister Chairman, Representative Mollohan and other Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

I am honored to come before you today representing my fellow board members in support of the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board's (CSB, or the Board) Fiscal Year 2001 appropriations request. Seated at the table with me are my colleagues on the Board, Dr. Paul L. Hill, Jr., Dr. Isadore Rosenthal and, Dr. Andrea Kidd Taylor. My comments are those of the full Board. Mr. Chairman, as I begin my abbreviated remarks on behalf of my colleagues I ask that the Board's previously submitted, more detailed written testimony be entered into the record.

In Fiscal Year 2001, the CSB is seeking an appropriation of \$9 million, which represents an increase of one million dollars over our FY 2000 appropriation. This amount represents the funding necessary for the Board to maintain a stable operating program and perform a modest number of incident investigations. It will also allow the Board to evaluate and revise its incident selection criteria, investigation protocol, and procedures for tracking recommendations. In addition, the Board will be able to initiate one safety study to complement its investigation and related activities. Finally, the increase will permit the Board to conduct monthly public meetings and hire two additional staff in our Office of Investigations and Safety Programs.

HUMAN AND FINANCIAL COSTS OF INCIDENTS

The mission of the Board is no less critical now than it was in 1990 when it was first created in legislation. Chemical incidents are costly both in human and economic terms. More than 14,000 facilities filed accident reports under the EPA's new Risk Management Program (RMP). A small portion of these facilities reported 1,900 major chemical release accidents over the five-year period. These incidents caused nearly 1,900 injuries and 33 deaths to employees and 141 injuries and 42 deaths to non-employees. We note that public emergency responders represented 58 of the injuries and 30 of the deaths among non-employees. On the financial side, members of the insurance industry have recently estimated direct losses from chemical releases within the purview of the CSB as being about \$1 billion per year.

REFOCUSING ON THE BOARD'S MISSION

Just under two months ago the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the Board resigned his position. This change in management represented an opportunity for the Board to refocus its vision, structure, and mode of operation to achieve its mission. As part of the effort, the Board is reassessing the manner in which it both defines and performs its mission, and concurrently is implementing changes derived from such evaluations.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board is to enhance the health and safety of workers and the public and to protect the environment by uncovering the underlying causes of accidental chemical releases and using these findings and supporting research to promote preventive actions by both the private and public sectors.

We accomplish our mission by:

- Conducting state-of-the art investigations.
- Producing high quality investigation reports.
- Conducting hazard, safety and data studies.
- Issuing targeted recommendations.
- Advocating effectively for these recommendations.

FY 2001 APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST

As you review the Board's FY 2001 budget request you will see that it tracks our restated objectives and priorities. The emphasis is on funds and personnel necessary for the conduct of investigations and safety program activities. This emphasis began this year, and is carried forward in our FY 2001 budget request.

Specifically, in FY 2001 we propose devoting 19.2 workyears and just under \$4.2 million for incident investigation and related activities. This compares with 10.7 workyears and just under \$2.5 million in FY 1999.

A similar increase in Special Safety Studies and Technical Guidance is proposed in FY 2001, where 4.1 workyears and \$670,000 is proposed, compared to one workyear and \$284,000 in FY 1999.

We have also decreased the resources devoted to areas not directly supporting the conduct of investigations in the area of technical information and assistance from 4.1 workyears and slightly over \$1 million in FY 1999 to 2.7 workyears and \$730,000 in FY 2001.

FY 2001 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE PLAN

The CSB is in the process of developing a strategic plan that will describe in detail the goals, objectives and performance measures that will help us achieve our mission over the next five years. In the interim, the CSB's Annual Performance Plan sets forth two strategic goals:

First, – To reduce the reoccurrence of chemical incidents addressed by the Board and minimize the adverse effects on life, health, and property.

Second, – To be a progressive 21st century federal agency, which facilitates the accomplishment of the Board's mission.

The specific performance goals associated with these two strategic goals are detailed both in our written testimony

and the FY 2001 performance plan, both of which have been previously submitted to the Subcommittee.

WHAT THE RESOURCES WILL ACHIEVE THIS FISCAL YEAR

Following the leadership changes in January of this year the Board restated the Board's mission as a basis for restructuring its priorities this year and establishing a better foundation for its activities in FY 2001 and beyond. In directing more focused activities in FY 2000, the Board has adopted eight critical objectives in order to achieve its mission this fiscal year. They are detailed in our written testimony.

BOARD'S CHEMICAL SAFETY ACHIEVEMENTS

Our struggles have been offset by significant successes and, of course, lessons learned. Completed incident investigation reports and safety study have been widely applauded for their scientific correctness, their readability and usability, and the applicability and practicality of their safety recommendations. Significantly, state governors, legislators, trade associations, companies, and emergency responders accept and use the safety recommendations.

For example, on January 7, 1998, two explosions in rapid succession destroyed the Sierra Chemical Company Kean Canyon plant near Reno, Nevada, killing four workers and injuring six others. Based on the Board's findings, Nevada's Occupational Safety and Health Enforcement

Section increased the frequency of safety inspections at explosives facilities to at least twice a year. Furthermore, in May 1999 the governor signed four additional measures aimed at improving safety at facilities where hazardous substances are produced.

On March 27, 1998, one worker was killed and an independent contractor was seriously injured due to nitrogen asphyxiation at a Union Carbide in Louisiana. The Hazardous Materials (HazMat) Training Department of the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), a labor union representing more than 225,000 professional career fire fighters and emergency medical personnel, used the Board's report as an "interactive case study" on its Distance Learning website.

On April 9, 1998 at the Herrig Brothers Farm in Iowa, two volunteer fire fighters were killed and seven other emergency response personnel were injured when a propane tank exploded. In response to a CSB recommendation, the National Propane Gas Association improved their emergency response training materials to better address the hazards of BLEVEs, an especially dangerous type of explosion. In addition, the Fire Service Institute of Iowa State University revised their training program to provide better guidance for responding to BLEVEs.

At Congress' request, the Board led a multi-stakeholder special safety study initiative to build awareness of Y2K chemical safety problems. We collaborated with the chemical industry, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, warning them of the potential for Y2K-related computer problems that might lead to an accidental chemical release or inhibit automated safety protection and response systems. The Board also testified before the Congress, interacted with the President's Council on Y2K Conversion, issued safety alert to the Governors and major safety organizations, promoted a national training initiative and used our award-winning website as a clearinghouse for Y2K and Safety.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Mollohan, and members of the Subcommittee: this morning and through our written testimony we have shared with you an assessment of both the Board's accomplishments and problems to date. We have charted a new course, guided by *all* of the members of the Board, and supported by a professional staff. We have retained the support of key stakeholders, and we request the continued support of this subcommittee.